



Celebrating Chartering @ 30 – MINNESOTA'S STORY

On March 20th, 1991, the Senate Education Committee chaired by Senator Tracy Beckman held the first hearing on Senator Reichgott's "outcomes-based" charter school bill. In his testimony before the Committee, North Branch School District Superintendent Jim Walker spoke about the lack of transparency in the bureaucracy of school districts and that "*The strength of the charter school bill is that it diffuses bureaucracy very, very quickly. I strongly suggest that a charter school will make a staff more responsive, will give the employees power to make decisions on what's best for them and what's best for children, and will greatly empower parents.*"

A teacher from North Branch suggested that "*Teachers are professionals with tremendous capacity. Teachers who possess energy, determination, and vision are big winners in a charter school system.*"

A teacher from a contract alternative school in Minneapolis testified that "*Youth need this bill. I and the staff people I work with need this bill. The larger bureaucracy is not set up to meet the need of these students.*"

Speaking in opposition to the bill and charter schools was the chief lobbyist for the MN School Board Association. He testified that the bill would create "*an alternative system of private schools with no rules that is publicly funded.*" The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, as well as a lobbyist for the MN Education Association (MEA) also spoke against the bill. The MEA lobbyist focused on the proposal which would allow unlicensed public school teachers in the second year of the chartered school. She also raised the issue of funding following the student: "*If funding followed the students, there would be dramatic impact on other programs schools can offer.*"

Within days of the hearing, Senator Reichgott invited charter school advocates and opponents to a meeting to find a way to address concerns." She wrote in ZERO CHANCE OF PASSAGE "*While I disagreed with many of their objections, I was committed to searching for some middle ground. I thought if they could perhaps achieve some visible 'victory', they might remain, at the very least, neutral on the bill.*"

However, as the meeting and subsequent meetings took place, the list of concerns by the opponents mounted. The opponents wanted to eliminate the provision in the bill that would allow post-secondary institutions to sponsor schools as well as the ability of the state school board to sponsor schools; to eliminate the provision that would allow unlicensed teachers to teach in charter schools as well as the provision which would allow the contracting of teaching services to agencies or groups which were not part of a district collective bargaining unit. The unions wanted provisions about licensing, tenure, and collective bargaining.

Involved in these discussions were two opponents: **Louise Sundin**, President of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, and Vice President of the MN Federation of Teachers, as well as a Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers, and **Rose Hermodson**, the lobbyist for the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers.

Given the concerns of the MN Federation of Teachers and discussions with advocates and Senate colleagues, Senator Reichgott prepared amendments to the bill that would only have school districts be sponsors and require licensed teachers. The amendments were presented at the bill's second hearing on April 16th.

COMMENT: 20 years later, **Sundin and Hermodson** would play a different role in terms of chartered public schools. **Sundin** became the first board chair of the **Minnesota Guild of Public Chartered Schools**, a single purpose authorizer created by the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and initially funded by the American Federation of Teachers, while **Hermodson** became an **Assistant Commissioner at the MN Department of Education**. Her portfolio included school choice programs and charter schools.

Quotes are from the book: **ZERO CHANCE of PASSAGE**, by Senator Ember Reichgott Junge. Limited copies of the book are still available. To order a copy email: ember.reichgott@gmail.com

NOTE: Next Tuesday 11/23 there will be **NO** Issue of *Celebrating Chartering @ 30 – Minnesota's Story*.

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